

Wainwright Building

709 Chestnut Street

This 10-story, iron-and-steel-framed office building, pivotal in the history of tall building design and construction, was built in 1890–1891 from designs by Louis Sullivan. Before the Wainwright, surfaces of tall buildings had been covered with architectural clichés that bore no relation to their structure. Here Sullivan articulated a tripartite division of base, shaft, and capital that — with carefully orchestrated fenestration patterns and rhythms of piers and spandrels — masterfully reflects and respects the metal-frame skeleton beneath. The Wainwright was threatened with demolition in the 1970s, but was saved when the State of Missouri purchased it and converted it for use as a state office building.